The Light in the Clearing

A TALE of the NORTH COUNTRY in the TIME of SILAS WRIGHT

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CHAPTER XVI—Continued.
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"One day the ol' squire got me to dig this grave an' put up the headstone an' then he tol' me the story. He turned the poor gal out o' doors. God o' Israel! It was in the night—yis, sir—it was in the night that he sent her away. Goldarn him! He didn't have no more heart than a grasshopper—no, sir—not a bit. I could 'a' brained him with my shovel. but I didn't.

"I found out where the gal had gone an' I follered her—yis I did—found her in the poorhouse way over on Pussley Hill—uh huh! She jes' put her arms 'round my neck an' cried an' cried. I guess 'twas 'cause I looked kind o' friendly—uh huh! I tol' her she should come right over to our house an' stay jest as long as she wanted to as soon as she got well—yis, sir, I did.

"She was sick all summer long—kind o' out o' her head, ye know, an' I used to go over hossback an' take things fer her to eat. An' one day when I was over there they was wonderin' what they was goin' to do with her little baby. I took it in my arms an' I'll be gol dummed if it didn't grab hold o' my nose an' hang on like a puppy to a root. When they tried to take it away it grabbed its fingers into my whiskers an' hollered like a panther—yis, sir. Wal, ye know I jes' fetched that little baby boy home in my arms, ay uh! My wife scolded me like Sam Hill—yis, sir—she had five of her own. I tol' her I was goin' to take it back in a day er two but after it had been in the house three days ye couldn't 'a' pulled it away from her with a windlass.

"We brought him up an' he was alwuss a good boy. We called him Enoch—Enoch Rone—did ye ever hear the name?"

"'No.'

"I didn't think 'twas likely but I'm alwuss hopin'.

"Early that fall Kate got better an' left the poorhouse afoot. Went away somewheres—nobody knew where. Some said she'd crossed the lake an' gone away over into York state, some said she'd drowned herself. By'm by we heard that she'd gone way over into St. Lawrence county where Silas Wright lives an' where young Grimshaw had settled down after he got married.

"Wal, 'bout five year ago the squire buried his second wife—there 'tis over in there back o' Kate's with the little speckled angel on it. Nobody had seen the squire outside o' his house for years until the funeral—he was crippled so with rheumatiz. After that he lived all 'lone in the big house with ol' Tom Linney an' his wife, who've worked there for 'bout forty year, I guess.

"Wal, sir, fust we knew Kate was there in the house livin' with her father. We wouldn't 'a' knowed it, then, if it hadn't been that Tom Linney come over one day an' said he guessed the ol' squire wanted to see me—no, sir, we wouldn't—fer the squire ain't sociable an' the neighbors never darken his door. She must 'a' come in the night, jest as she went—nobody see her go an' nobody see her come, an' that's a fact. Wal, one day las' fall after the leaves was off an' they could see a corner o' my house through the bushes, Tom was walkin' the ol' man 'round the room. All to once he stopped an' p'inted at my house through the winder an' kep' p'intin'. Tom come over an' said he ca'llated the squire wanted to see me. So I went there. Kate met me at the door. Gosh! How old an' kind o' broke down she looked! But I knew her the minute I set my eyes on her—uh huh—an' she knew me—yis, sir—she smiled an' tears come to her eyes an' she patted my hand like she wanted to tell me that she hadn't forgot, but she never said a word—not a word. The ol' squire had the palsy, so 't he couldn't use his hands an' his throat was paralyzed—couldn't speak nor nothin'. Where do ye suppose he was when I found him?"

"In bed?" I asked.

"No, sir—no, siree! He was in hell—that's where he was—reg'lar ol' fashioned, down-east hell, burnin' with fire an' brimstun, that he'd had the agency for an' had recommended to every sinner in the neighborhood. He was settin' in his room. God o' Isr'el! You orto 'a' seen the motions he made with his hands an' the way he tried to speak when I went in there, but all I could hear was jest a long yell an' a kind of a rattle in his throat. Heavens an' airth! how desperit he tried to spit out the thing that was gnawin' his vitals. Ag'in an' ag'in he'd try to tell me. Lord God! how he did work!"

"All to once it come acrost me what he wanted—quick as ye could say scat. He wanted to have Kate's headstun took down an' put away—that's what he wanted. The stun was kind o' layin' on his stummick an' painin' of him day an' night. He couldn't stan' it. He knew that he was goin' to die purty soon an' that Kate would come here an' see it an' that everybody would see her standin' here by her own grave, an' it worried him. It was kind o' like a fire in his belly.

"I guess, too, he couldn't bear the idee of layin' down fer his las' sleep beside that hell hole he'd dug fer Kate—no, sir!

"Wal, ye know, mister, I jes' shook my head an' never let on that I knew what he meant an' let him wiggle an' twist like a worm on a hot griddle, an' beller like a cut bull 'til he fell back in a swoon.

"Damn him! it don't give him no rest. He tries to tell everybody he sees—that's what they say. He bellers day an' night an' if you go down there he'll beller to you an' you'll know what it's about, but the others don't.

"You an' me are the only ones that knows the secret, I guess. Some day, 'fore he dies, I'm goin' to take up that headstun an' hide it, but he'll never know it's done—no, sir—not 'til he gits to the judgment seat, anyway."

The old man rose and straightened himself and blew out his breath and brushed his hands upon his trousers by way of stepping down into this world again out of the close and dusty loft of his memory. But I called him back.

"What has become of Enoch?" I asked.

"Wal, sir, Enoch started off West 'bout three year ago an' we ain't heard a word from him since that day—nary a word, mister. I suppose we will some time. He grew into a good man, but there was a kind of a queer streak in the blood, as ye might say, on both sides kind o'. We've wrote letters out to Wisconsin, where he was p'intin' for, an' to places on the way, but we can't git no news 'bout him. Mebbe he was killed by the Injuns."

We walked out of the graveyard together in silence.

I could see a glimmer of a light in the thicket of pines down the valley. I unhitched and mounted my horse.

"Take the first turn to the right," said the old man as he picked up his scythe.

"I'm very much obliged to you," I said.

"No ye ain't, nuther," he answered. "Leastways there ain't no reason why ye should be."

My horse, impatient as ever to find the end of the road, hurried me along and in a moment or two we were down under the pine grove that surrounded the house of old Squire Fullerton—a big, stone house with a graveled road around it. A great black dog came barking and growling at me from the front porch. I rode around the house and he followed. Beyond the windows I could see the gleam of candlelight and moving figures. A man came out of the back door as I neared it.

"Who's there?" he demanded.

"My name is Barton Baynes from St. Lawrence county. Kate Fullerton is my friend and I wish to see her."

"Come up to the steps, sor. Don't git off yer horse—'til I've chained the dog. Kate'll be out in a minute."

He chained the dog to the hitching post and as he did so a loud, long, wailing cry broke the silence of the house. It put me in mind of the complaint of the damned which I remembered hearing the minister describe years before at the little schoolhouse in Lickitysplit. How it harrowed me!

The man went into the house. Soon he came out of the door with a lighted candle in his hand, a woman following. How vividly I remember the little murmur of delight that came from her lips when he held the candle so that its light fell upon my face! I jumped off my horse and gave the reins to the man and put my arms around the poor woman, whom I loved for her sorrows and for my debt to her, and rained kisses upon her withered cheek. Oh God! what a moment it was for both of us!

The way she held me to her breast and patted my shoulder and said "my boy!"—in a low, faint, treble voice so like that of a child—it is one of the best memories that I take with me into the new life now so near, from which there is no returning.

She led me into the house. She looked very neat now—in a black gown over which was a spotless white apron and collar of lace—and much more slender than when I had seen her last. She took me into a large room in the front of the house with a carpet and furniture, handsome once but now worn and decrepit. Old, time-stained engravings of scenes from the Bible, framed in wood, hung on the walls.

I told all that I had heard from home and of my life in Cobleskill but observed, presently, a faraway look in her eyes and judged that she was not hearing me. She whispered:

"Sally?"

"She has been at school in Albany for a year," I said. "She is at home now and I am going to see her."

"You love Sally?" she whispered.

"Better than I love my life."

Again she whispered: "Get married!"

"We hope to in 1844. I have agreed to meet her by the big pine tree on the river bank at eleven o'clock the third of June, 1844. We are looking forward to that day."

A tall, slim woman entered the room then and said that supper was ready. Kate rose with a smile and I followed her into the dining room where two tables were spread. One had certain dishes on it and a white cover, frayed and worn. She led me to the other table which was neatly covered with snowy linen. The tall woman served a supper on deep blue china, cooked as only they could cook in old New England. Meanwhile I could hear the voice of the aged squire—a weird, empty, inhuman voice it was, utterly cut off from his intelligence. It came out of the troubled depths of his misery.

So that house—the scene of his great sin which would presently lie down with him in the dust—was flooded, a hundred times a day, by the unhappy spirit of its master. In the dead of the night I heard its despair echoing through the silent chambers.

Kate said little as we ate, or as we sat together in the shabby, great room after supper, but she seemed to enjoy my talk and I went into the details of my personal history.

The look on her face, even while I was speaking, indicated that her thoughts wandered, restlessly, in the gloomy desert of her past. I thought of that gay, birdlike youth of hers of which the old man with the scythe had told me, and wondered. As I was thinking of this there came a cry from the aged squire so loud and doleful that it startled me and I turned and looked toward the open door.

Kate rose and came to my side and leaned toward my ear whispering:

"It is my father. He is always thinking of when I was a girl. He wants me."

She bade me good night and left the room. Doubtless it was the outraged, departed spirit of that golden time which was haunting the old squire. A Bible lay on the table near me and I sat reading it for an hour or so. A tall clock in a corner solemnly tolled the hour of nine. In came the tall woman and asked me in the brogue of the Irish:

"Would you like to go to bed?"

"Yes, I am tired."

She took a candle and led me up a broad oaken stairway and into a room of the most generous proportions. A big four-post bedstead, draped in white, stood against a wall. The bed, sheeted in old linen, had quilted covers. The room was noticeably clean; its furniture of old mahogany and its carpet comparatively unworn.

When I undressed I dreaded to put out the candle. For the first time in years I had a kind of child-fear of the night. But I went to bed at last and slept rather fitfully, waking often when the cries of the old squire came flooding through the walls. How I longed for the light of the morning! It came at last and I rose and dressed and went out of doors.

Kate met me at the door when I went back into the house and kissed my cheek and again I heard those half-spoken words: "My boy." I ate my breakfast with her and when I was about to get into my saddle at the door I gave her a hug and, as she tenderly patted my cheek, a smile lighted her countenance so that it seemed to shine upon me. I have never forgotten its serenity and sweetness.

CHAPTER XVII.

I Start in a Long Way.

We reached Canton at six o'clock in the evening of a beautiful summer day. I went at once to call upon the Dunkelbergs and learned from a man at work in the dooryard that they had gone away for the summer. How keen was my disappointment! I went to the tavern and got my supper and then over to Ashery lane to see Michael Hacket and his family. I found the schoolmaster playing his violin.

"Now God be praised—here is Bart!" he exclaimed as he put down his instrument and took my hands in his. "I've heard, my boy, how bravely ye've weathered the capes an' I'm proud o' ye—that I am!"

I wondered what he meant for a second and then asked:

"How go these days with you?"

"Swift as the weaver's shuttle," he answered. "Sit you down, while I call the family. They're out in the kitchen putting the dishes away. Many hands make light labor."

They came quickly and gathered about me—a noisy, happy group. The younger children kissed me and sat on my knees and gave me the small news of the neighborhood.

How good were the look of those friendly faces and the full-hearted pleasure of the whole family at my coming!

"What a joy for the spare room!" exclaimed the schoolmaster. "Sure I wouldn't wonder if the old bed was dancin' on its four legs this very minute."

"I intend to walk up to the hills tonight," I said.

"Up to the hills!" he exclaimed merrily. "An' the Hackets lyin' awake thinkin' o' ye on the dark road! Try it, boy, an' ye'll get a crack with the ruler and an hour after school. Yer aunt and uncle will be stronger to stand yer comin' with the night's rest upon them. Ye wouldn't be routin' them out o' bed an' they after a hard day with the hayin'! Then, my kind-hearted lad, ye must give a thought to Michael Henry. He's still alive an' stronger than ever—thank God!"

So, although I longed for those most dear to me up in the hills, I spent the night with the Hackets and the schoolmaster and I sat an hour together after the family had gone to bed.

"How are the Dunkelberg's?" I asked.

"Sunk in the soft embrace o' luxury," he answered. "Grimshaw made him; Grimshaw liked him. He was always ready to lick the boots o' Grimshaw. It turned out that Grimshaw left him an annuity of three thousand dollars, which he can enjoy as long as he observes one condition."

"What is that?"

"He must not let his daughter marry one Barton Baynes, late o' the town o' Ballybeen. How is that for spite, my boy? They say it's written down in the will."

I think that he must have seen the flame of color playing on my face, for he quickly added:

"Don't worry, lad. The will o' God is greater than the will o' Grimshaw. He made you two for each other and she will be true to ye, as true as the needle to the north star."

"Do you think so?"

"Sure I do. Didn't she as much as tell me that here in this room—not a week ago? She loves ye, boy, as true as God loves ye, an' she's a girl of a thousand."

"Why did they go away? Was it because I was coming?"

"I think it likely, my fine lad. The man heard o' it some way—perhaps through yer uncle. He's crazy for the money, but he'll get over that. Leave him to me. I've a fine course o' instruction ready for my lord o' Dunkelberg."

"I think I shall go and try to find her," I said.

"I am to counsel ye about that," said the schoolmaster. "She's as keen as a brier—the fox! She says, 'Keep away. Don't alarm him, or he'll bundle us off to Europe for two or three years.'

"So there's the trail ye travel, my boy. It's the one that keeps away. Don't let him think ye've anything up the sleeve o' yer mind. Ah, my lad, I know the heart o' youth! Ye'd like to be puttin' yer arms around her—wouldn't ye, now? Sure, there's time enough! Ye're in the old treadmill o' God—the both o' ye! Ye're bein' weighed an' tried for the great prize. It's not pleasant, but it's better so. Go on, now, an' do yer best an' whatever comes take it like a man."

A little silence followed. He broke it with these words:

"Ye're done with that business in Cobleskill, an' I'm glad. Ye didn't know ye were bein' tried there—did ye? Ye've stood it like a man. What will ye be doin' now?"

"I'd like to go to Washington with the senator."

He laughed heartily.

"I was hopin' ye'd say that," he went on. "Well, boy, I think it can be arranged. I'll see the senator as soon as ever he comes an' I believe he'll be glad to know o' yer wishes. I think he's been hopin', like, that ye would propose it. Go up to the farm and spend a happy month or two with yer aunt an' uncle. It'll do ye good. Ye've been growin' plump down there. Go an' melt it off in the fields."

A little more talk and we were off to bed with our candles.

Next morning I went down into the main street of the village before leaving for home. I wanted to see how it looked and, to be quite frank, I wanted some of the people of Canton to see how I looked, for my clothes were of the best cloth and cut in the latest fashion. Many stopped me and shook my hand—men and women who had never noticed me before, but there was a quality in their smiles that I didn't quite enjoy. I know now that they thought me a little too grand on the outside. What a stern-souled lot those Yankees were! "All ain't gold that glitters." How often I had heard that version of the old motto!

"Why, you look like the senator when he is just gittin' home from the capital," said Mr. Jenison.

They were not yet willing to take me at the par of my appearance.

I met Betsy Price—one of my schoolmates—on the street. She was very cordial and told me that the Dunkelbergs had gone to Saratoga.

"I got a letter from Sally this morning," Betsy went on. "She said that young Mr. Latour was at the same hotel and that he and her father were good friends."

I wonder if she really enjoyed sticking this thorn into my flesh—a thorn which made it difficult for me to follow the advice of the schoolmaster and robbed me of the little peace I might have enjoyed. My faith in Sally wavered up and down until it settled at its wonted level and reassured me.

It was a perfect summer morning and I enjoyed my walk over the familiar road and up into the hill country. The birds seemed to sing a welcome to me. Men and boys I had known waved their hats in the hayfields and looked at me. There are few pleasures in this world like that of a boy getting home after a long absence.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Wrist Blotter.

In these days of wrist watches there seems to be a call for the simple wrist blotter recently invented by Harland W. Cardwell of Texarkana, Tex. This device consists merely of a curved blotter back, blotter and a wrist strap, so that the blotter may be worn on the right hand of the user. Thus the blotter is instantly available for use, and the pen does not have to be laid down.

Optimistic Thought.

If illness has its trials it also has its blessings.

FUNERAL A PICNIC FOR DOG

Rover Had Quite a Good Time While on His Way to His Last Resting Place.

A big picnic was planned and I was slated to transport the refreshments and a crowd of relatives to the picnic grounds, writes a correspondent of the Chicago Tribune. I placed the boxes and baskets containing the sandwiches, cake, fried chicken, etc., in a trailer, hitched the trailer to my car, already filled to overflowing, and started gayly on my way.

A huge dog belonging to my aunt accompanied us, and I had the misfortune to run the heavily loaded machine over him, killing him instantly, as we all thought. My aunt was deeply affected and insisted that I take Rover's body along and bury it beside the river. I loaded the dog's carcass into the trailer and started on again, but not so gayly.

When we reached the picnic grounds and I reconnoitered in my trailer I beheld Rover sitting up licking his chops, as large as life, or larger, I should say, for he had devoured all our provisions.

After He Had Declined It.

"What made Latin a dead language, pa?" "Oh, I guess somebody doctored it."—Cartoons Magazine.

Good taste is the flower of good sense.

NOT AN UNNATURAL ERROR

Inquirer Might Be Excused for Thinking Old Lady Was Gone Beyond Recall.

Concerning the cheese that made Limburg famous, a bulletin of the National Geographic society quotes a communication from William Wisner Chapin as follows:

"Limburg is sometimes called the garden of Holland. Of the celebrated relish known as Limburger cheese it has long been a query how an article of food made from delicious material and considered such a delicacy can possess so obnoxious an odor and still retain its self-respect. This peculiarity has made Limburger cheese responsible for many amusing incidents.

"A Dutch-American rural citizen once went to town to make some purchases, among which was some of this odoriferous commodity. For convenience he placed it in a long box in the wagon behind the seat. Happening to stop on the road, an inquisitive acquaintance approached and asked what the box contained.

"In answer he raised the lid and replied, 'I have my grandmother.'

"'Well,' rejoined the inquirer, as he caught a whiff of the contents, 'she's not in a trance.'"

Hammer and Tongs Type.

The Girl—"I admire that pianist's finish. Don't you?" The Man—"Yes, but I always dread his beginning."